



Assessing the Impact of Army Life on Families Living in Europe: A Comparison of Senior Spouses to Junior Spouses



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Summary of Key Findings (1 of 3)

- Senior leader and junior spouses participated in the study. Senior leader spouses were the spouses of Sergeant Majors, Colonels or General Officers. Junior spouses were the spouses of soldiers at the company level.
- Findings are based on surveys (n = 110) and interviews (n = 78) with U.S. Army Senior leader and Junior spouses living in Europe during 2001 and 2002.
- The focus of this brief is on the four unique demands of Army life: geographic mobility, residence in a foreign country, fear of soldier injury or death, and deployments and separations.
- These demands had a significant impact on Junior spouse health, satisfaction with the Army and their desire for their soldier to remain in the Army but these demands did not have a significant impact on Senior spouse health, satisfaction or retention preference.
- The findings indicate that all spouses were generally in good physical and psychological health.

Geographic Mobility

- On average, Senior and Junior spouses reported living in Europe almost 2 years.
- Few Senior or Junior spouses (< 12%) agreed that the sponsorship program in Europe functions well.
- While moving was associated with health and satisfaction with the Army for Junior spouses, these relationships did not hold for Senior spouses.



Summary of Key Findings (2 of 3)

Residence in a Foreign Country (Living Overseas)

- Most spouses liked living in Europe but Senior spouses had a significantly better perception of living abroad than did Junior spouses.
- Forty-five percent of Junior spouses could hardly wait to go stateside compared to only 16% of Senior spouses.

Fear of Soldier Injury or Death

- While 84% of both Senior and Junior spouses reported that their soldiers were well trained to handle the dangers of deployment, at least 75% of all spouses were worried that their soldiers would be injured and over 50% of all spouses were worried about their soldiers being killed during a deployment.
- Junior spouses had significantly higher fear levels regarding soldier injury or death than did Senior spouses.
- Despite these fears, the majority of Senior and Junior spouses did not have medical or general powers of attorney.
- Over three-quarters of Senior spouses had wills (77%) compared to less than a third (32%) of Junior spouses.



Summary of Key Findings (3 of 3)

Deployments

- The spouses of Junior soldiers were away for training and field exercises significantly more days than soldiers of Senior spouses. However, the average number of times soldiers were deployed in the last year was the same for both Senior and Junior spouses.
- Junior spouses reported significantly more adverse effects on their marriages and families due to deployments than did Senior spouses.

Separations

- Both Senior and Junior spouses became more independent when separated from their soldiers.
- Additionally, all spouses reported greater feelings of closeness once their soldiers returned.



Study Objectives

- Determine how OPTEMPO impacts the health and well-being of the family as well as soldier retention and readiness.
- Determine the social and psychological factors that promote family health and well-being when living outside the United States in a high OPTEMPO environment.
- Standardize and validate unique assessment tools that measure family health and well-being, to include the following scales:

Soldier Commitment to the Family
Living OCONUS
Deployments
Fear of Injury or Death

Moving
Quality of Life
Separations
Army Support



Categories of Survey Measures

Personal Characteristics

Employment

Social Support

Health-related Behaviors

Psychological Health and Well-being

Physical Health Symptoms

Family Characteristics

Marital Satisfaction

Children

Soldier Commitment to Family

Work/family; Family/work conflict

Characteristics of Army Life

Geographic Mobility

Residence in a Foreign Country

Separations/deployments

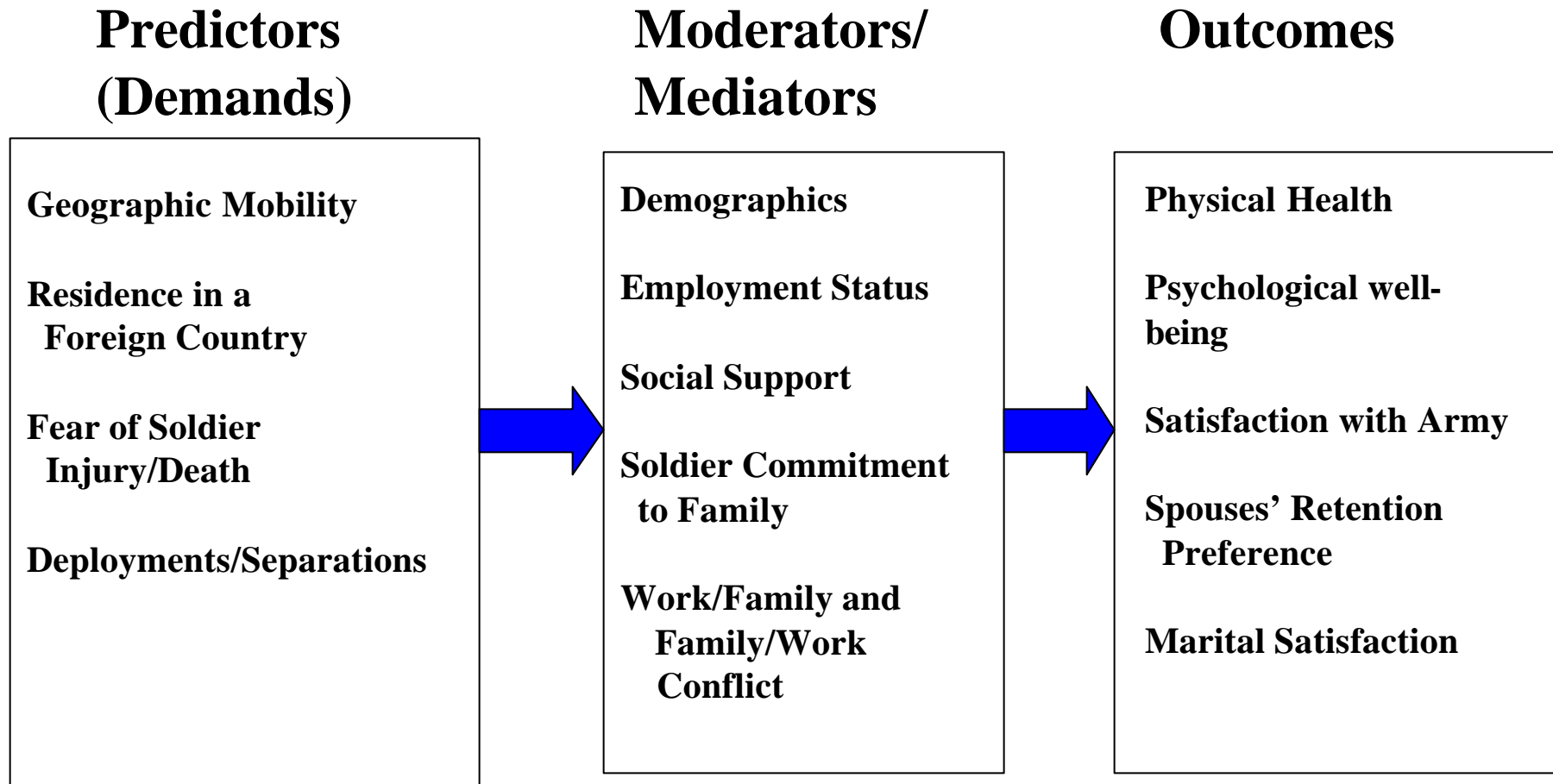
Risk of injury/death of Soldier

Spouse Satisfaction with the Army

Retention Preferences



OPTEMPO Family Research Model





Sample: Survey and Interviews

Survey Sample- Surveys were sent to spouses during 2001

32 Senior spouse surveys were completed out of 95 that were mailed (1 was undeliverable) for a 34% response rate.

78 Junior spouse surveys were completed out of 361 surveys that were mailed (57 surveys were undeliverable or incomplete) for a 26% response rate.

Interview Sample

April-June 2001- 50 Junior spouse interviews were conducted (12 EFMP, 6 Single parents, 7 Dual military, 25 civilian spouses)

January 2002- 28 Senior spouse interviews were conducted (1 Sergeant Major, 7 Command Sergeant Majors, 12 Colonels, 8 Generals)



Demographics

Gender: Senior Spouses: Female 100%

Junior Spouses: Female 97%

Average age: Senior Spouses: 47 years

Junior Spouses: 29 years

Ethnicity/race:	Senior Spouses	Junior Spouses
White	88%	76%
Hispanic	3%	10%
African-American	6 %	8%
Asian	3%	5%
Other	0%	1%

Education:

	Senior Spouses	Junior Spouses
Less than high school	0%	5%
GED or high school graduate	3%	16%
College or technical training or college graduate	75%	68%
Graduate training or graduate degree	22%	11%

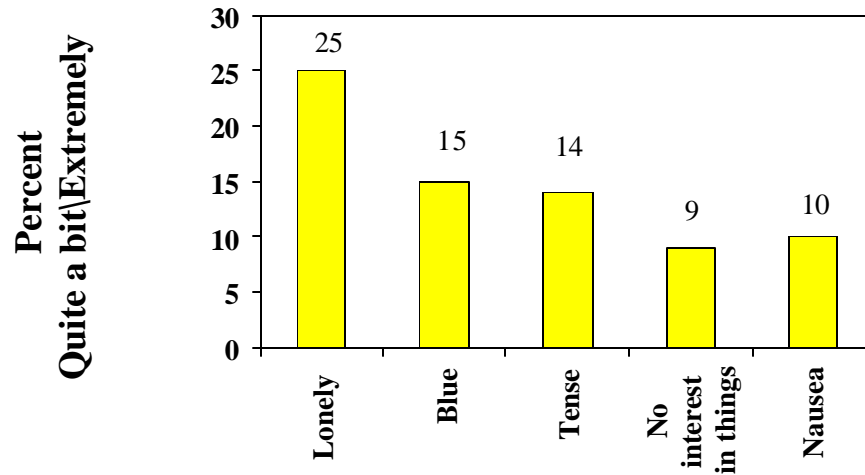
	Senior Spouses	Junior Spouses
Military brat:	22%	20%
Percent with children:	94%	72%
Employed:	31%	48%



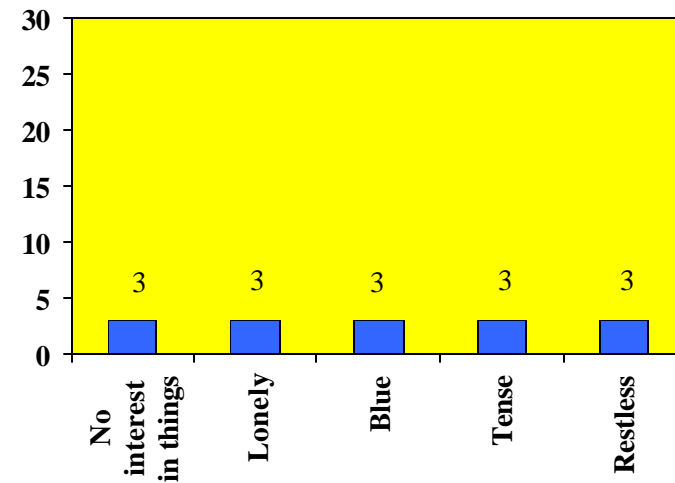
Psychological Health

- Although Senior spouses reported significantly fewer symptoms than Junior spouses in the past 7 days ($t = -3.57$, $df = 108$, $p < .001$), overall, all spouses reported minimal general distress.
- Feeling lonely, blue, tense and having no interest in things were the most reported symptoms by both Senior and Junior spouses.

5 Most Reported Symptoms for Junior Spouses



5 Most Reported Symptoms for Senior Spouses

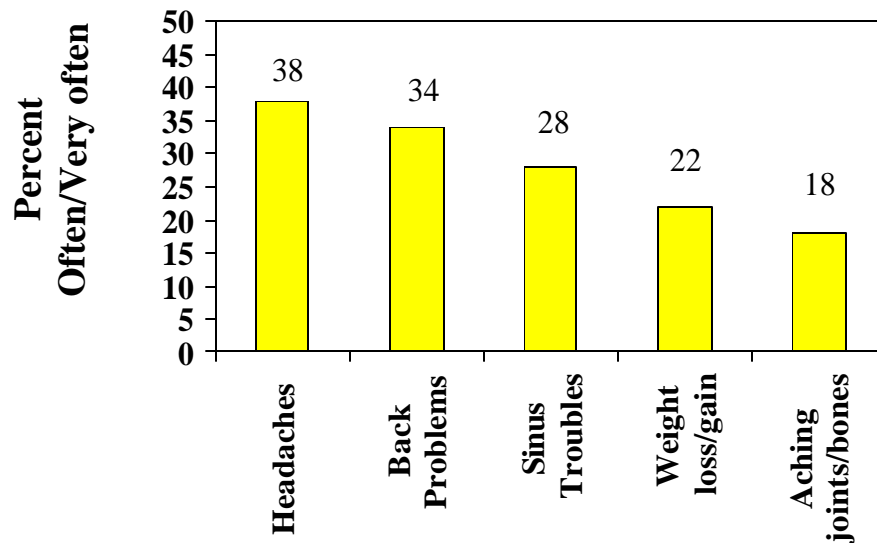




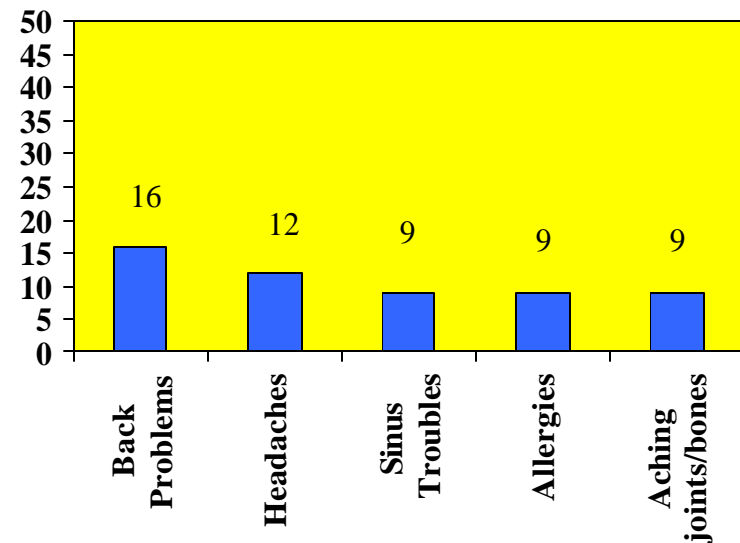
Physical Health

- Although Senior spouses reported significantly fewer physical symptoms than Junior spouses in the past month ($t = -3.23$, $df = 108$, $p < .002$), overall, all spouses reported relatively few physical symptoms.
- Headaches and back problems were the two symptoms most reported by both groups.

5 Most Reported Symptoms for Junior Spouses



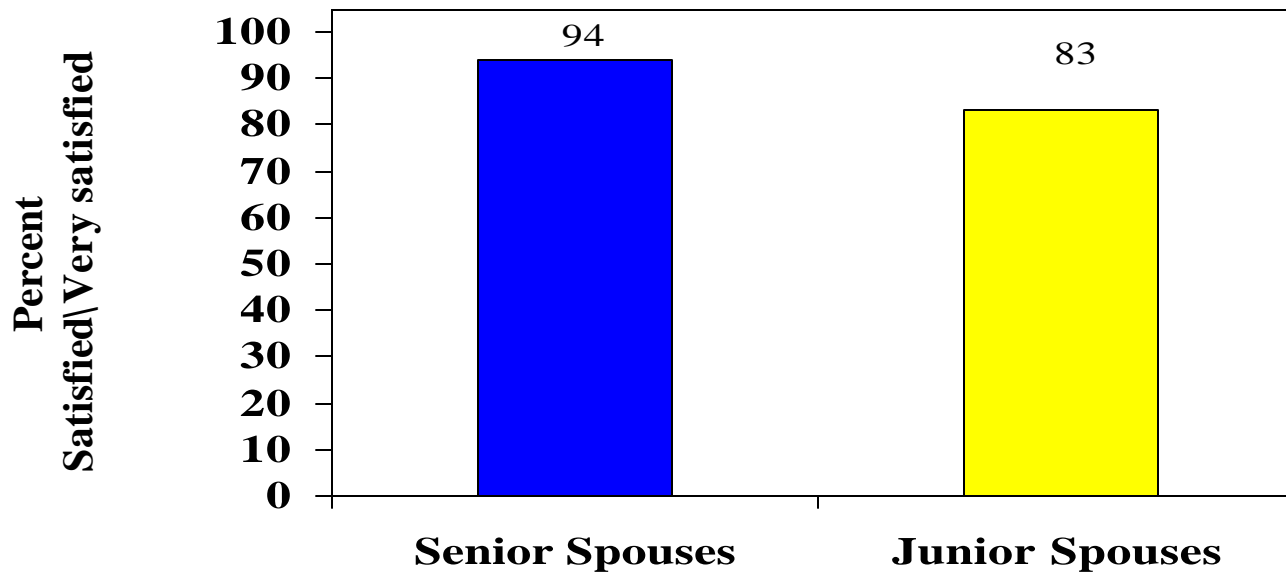
5 Most Reported Symptoms for Senior Spouses





Marital Status and Satisfaction

- There were no differences between Senior or Junior spouses with regard to their marital satisfaction levels ($t = 1.74$, $df = 105$, $p < .084$).
- The average number of years married for Senior Spouses was 23 years while for Junior spouses it was 6 years ($t = 11.6$, $df = 108$, $p < .000$).
- For senior spouses 88% said it was their first marriage and for Junior spouses 82% said it was their first marriage.





Soldier Commitment to Family

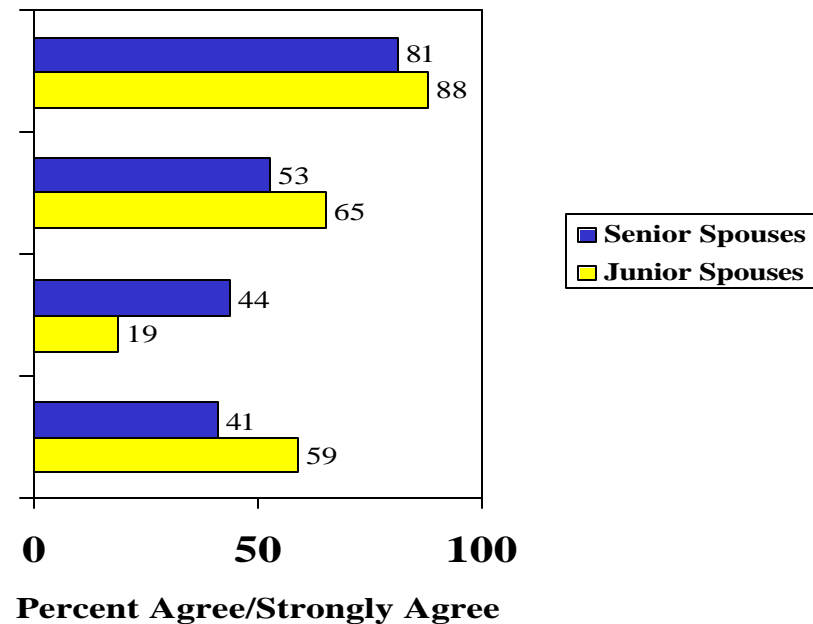
- Both Senior and Junior spouses felt that their soldiers were committed to the family.
- Junior spouses reported significantly greater emotional and behavioral commitment from their soldiers than Senior spouses ($t_s \leq 2.6$, $df = 107$, $p_s < .05$).
- Compared to Junior spouses, fewer Senior spouses agreed that their soldiers believe family needs come first.

****When my spouse is away from home s/he phones or emails as often as possible.**

****My spouse shares in household tasks**

***I feel as though my spouses' job is the most important thing in the world to him/her.**

****If family needs conflict with the job, my spouse believes family needs come first**



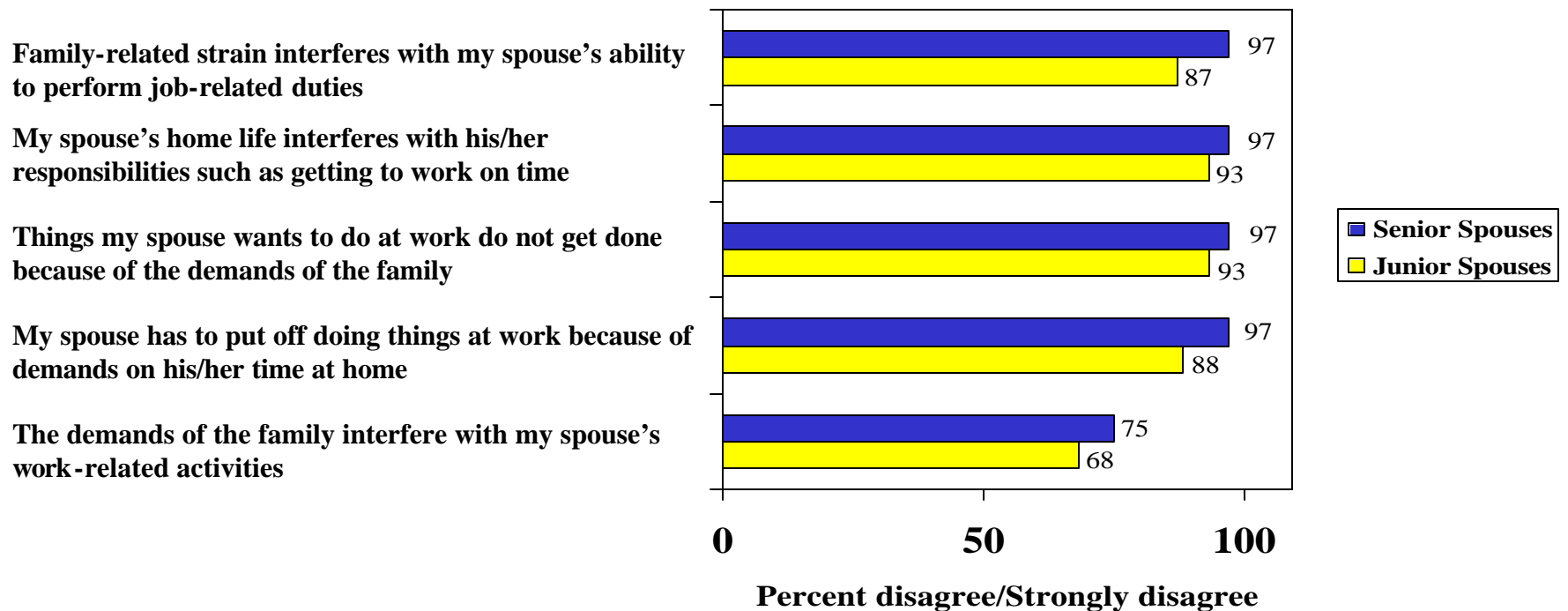
*Example of soldier's emotional commitment

**Examples of soldier's behavioral commitment



Family/Work Conflict

- Both Senior and Junior spouses indicated low levels of family/work conflict. Senior spouses reported significantly less conflict than Junior spouses ($t = -3.84$, $df = 106$, $p < .000$).
- Sixty-eight percent of Junior spouses and 75% of Senior spouses disagree with the statement “The demands of the family interfere with my spouse’s work-related activities.”





Work/Family Conflict

- Both Senior and Junior spouses indicated high levels of work/family conflict. Junior spouses reported significantly more conflict than Senior spouses ($t = 2.92$, $df = 107$, $p < .004$).
- Over half of the Senior spouses (53%) and almost three-quarters (74%) of the Junior spouses indicate that their soldiers' jobs interfere with home and family life.

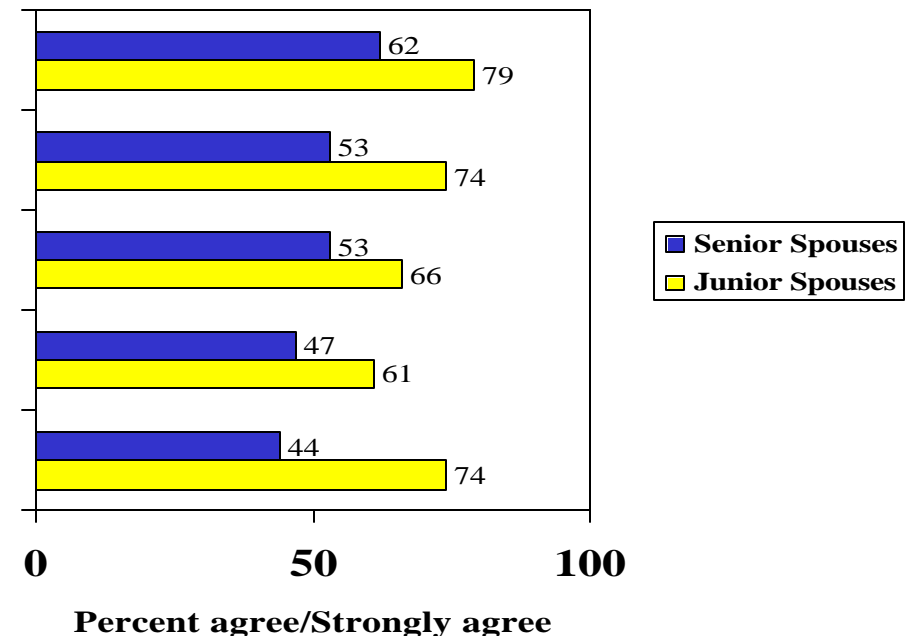
Due to my spouses' work, I have to make changes to plans for family activities

The demands of my spouses' work interferes with home and family life

The amount of time my spouses' job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family duties

Things I want my spouse to do at home don't get done due to job demands

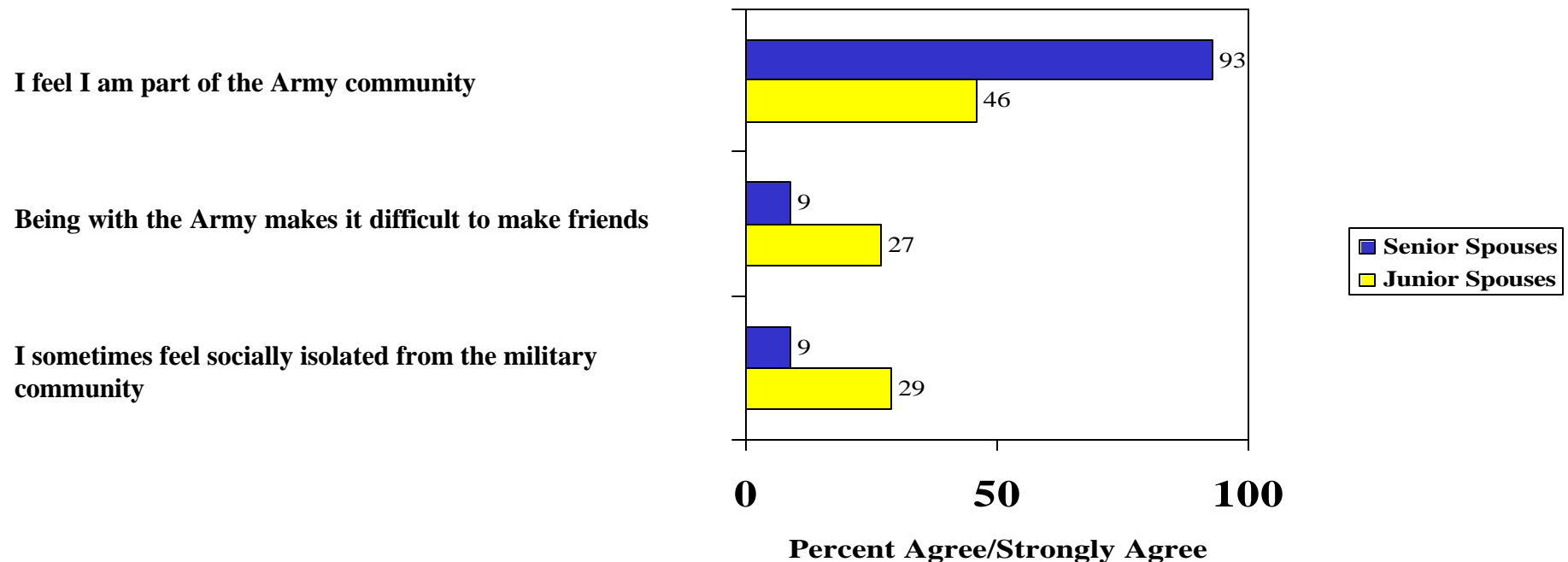
My spouses' job produces strain that makes it difficult for him/her to fulfill family duties





Army Community

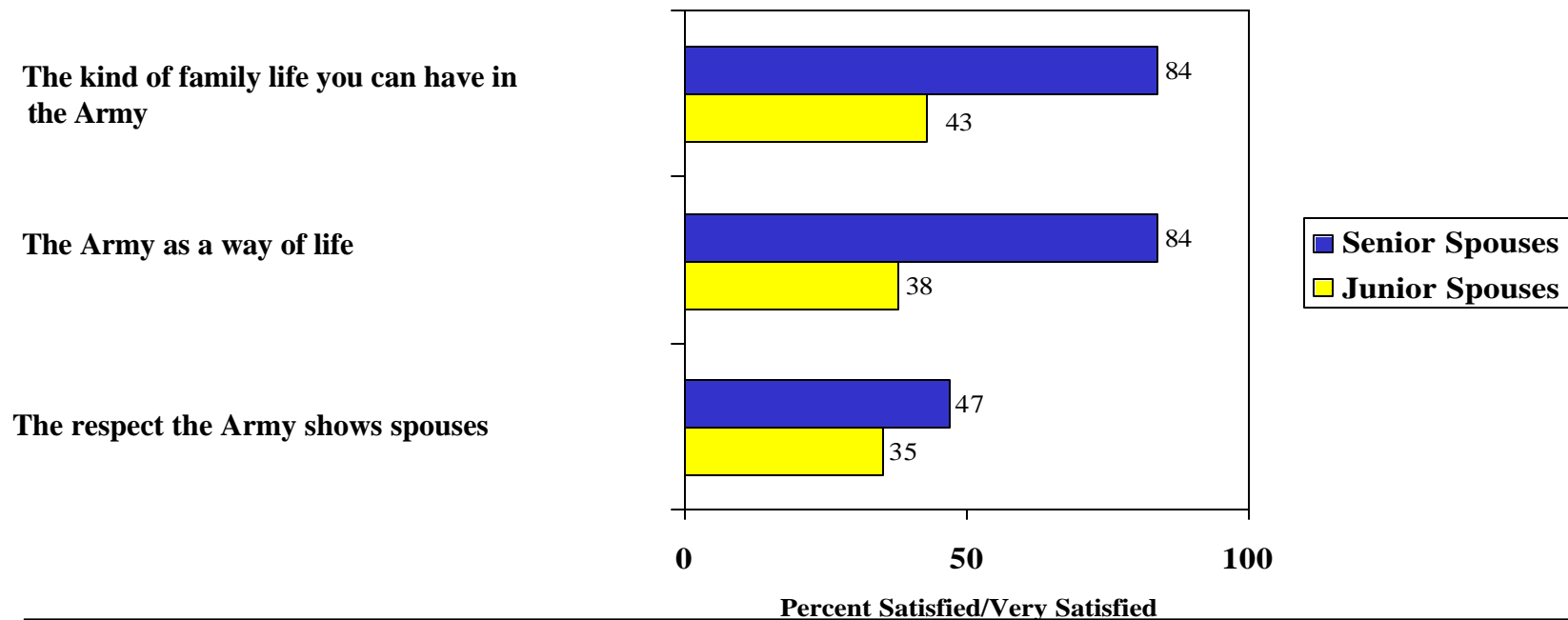
- Significantly more Senior spouses reported that they were a part of the Army community than did Junior spouses ($t = 6.6$, $df = 104$, $p < .000$).
- Compared to Senior spouses, more Junior spouses indicated that the Army makes it difficult to have friends and that they sometimes feel isolated from the military community.





Satisfaction with the Army

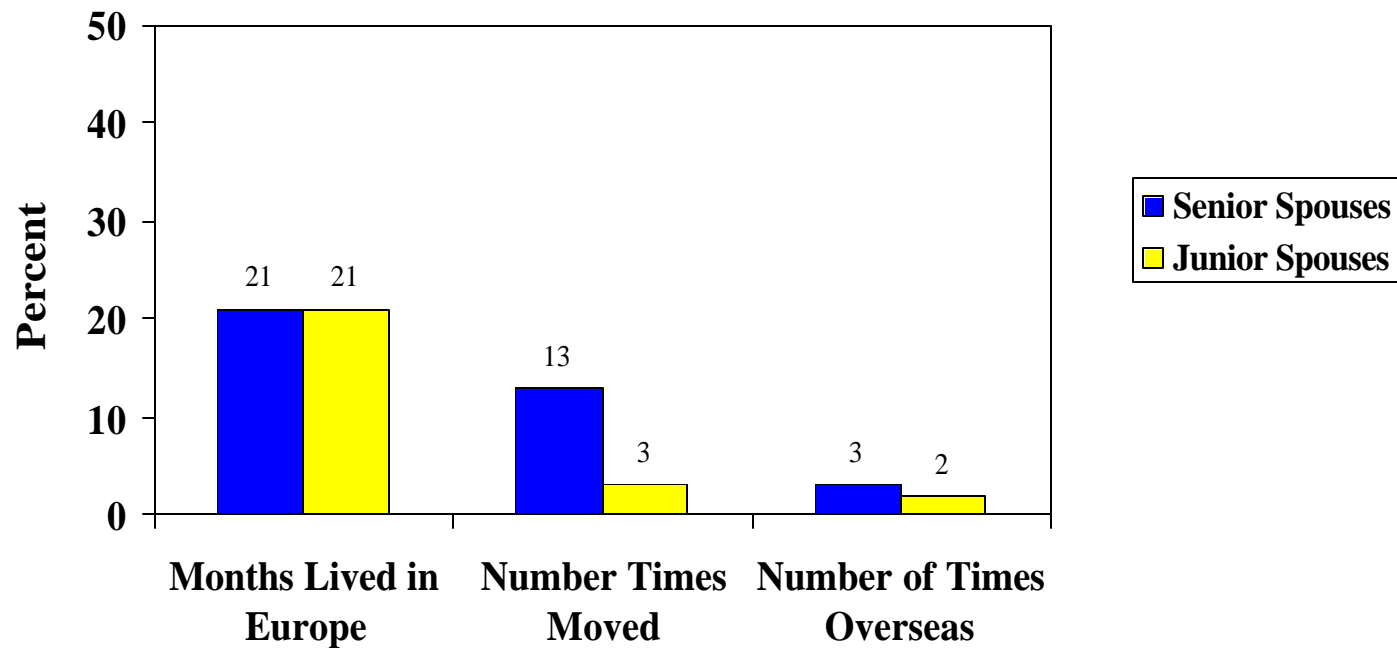
- Overall satisfaction levels were significantly lower for Junior spouses compared to Senior spouses ($t = -4.93$, $df = 107$, $p < .000$).
- Most spouses were not satisfied with the respect that the Army shows for them.
- Compared to Senior spouses, far fewer Junior spouses were satisfied with the kind of family life they could have in the Army and with the Army as a way of life.





Geographic Mobility

- On average Senior and Junior spouses have lived in Europe for almost two years.
- Senior spouses have moved significantly more ($t = 8.2$, $df = 108$, $p < .000$) than Junior spouses, including to overseas locations ($t = 4.68$, $df = 108$, $p < .000$).





Geographic Mobility

- The majority of Senior spouses reported that their move to Europe was a positive experience but the majority of Junior spouses did not ($t = 4.85$, $df = 108$, $p < .000$).
- Fewer Junior spouses indicated that the move had a positive impact on their family compared to Senior spouses.
- Few Senior or Junior spouses agreed that the sponsorship program functions well.

Our arrival in Europe was a pleasant experience

One of the benefits of being a military spouse is getting to move

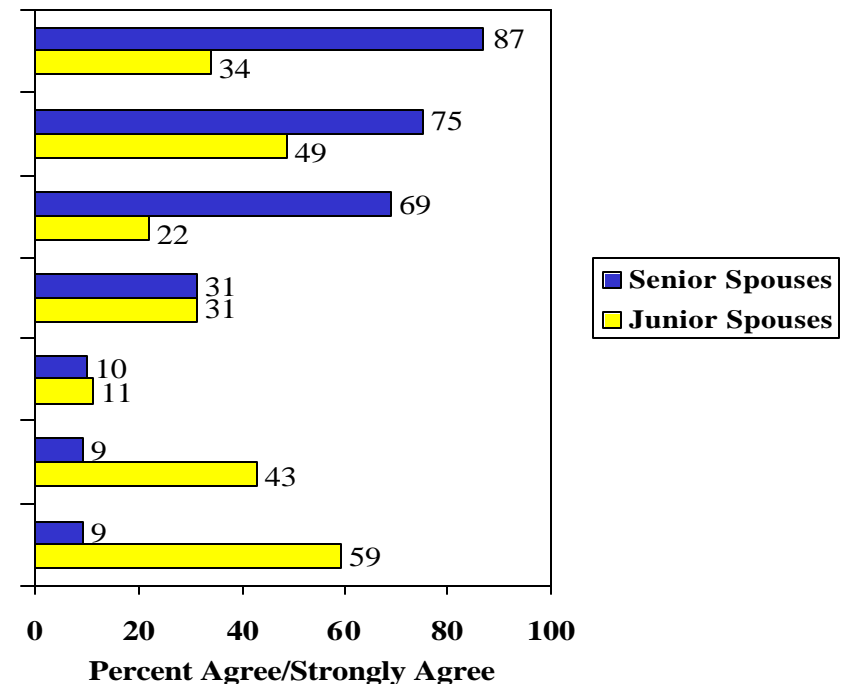
Moving has had a positive impact on my family

We move more frequently than I would like

The sponsorship program in Europe functions well

Moving is difficult on our children

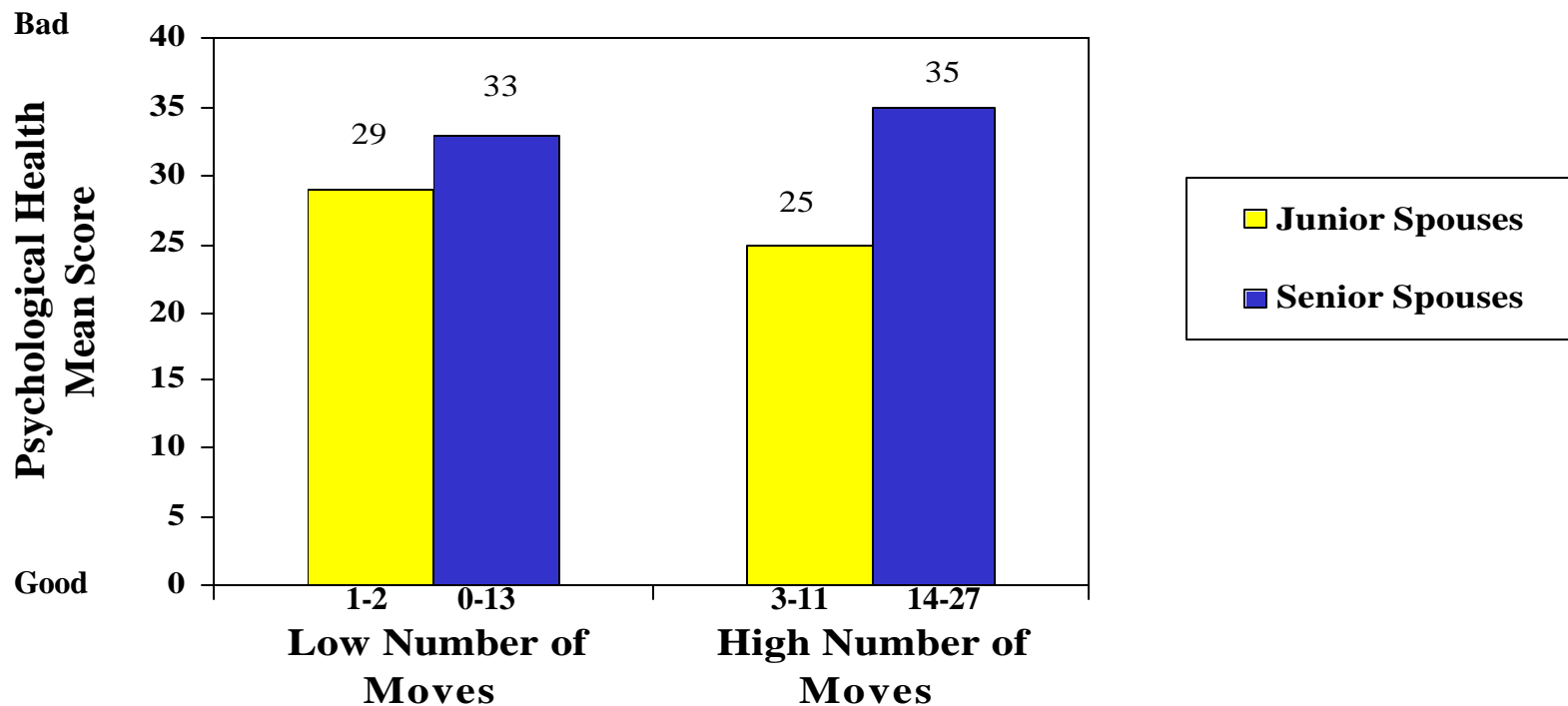
Moving has made it difficult to find a good job





Number of Moves: Psychological Health

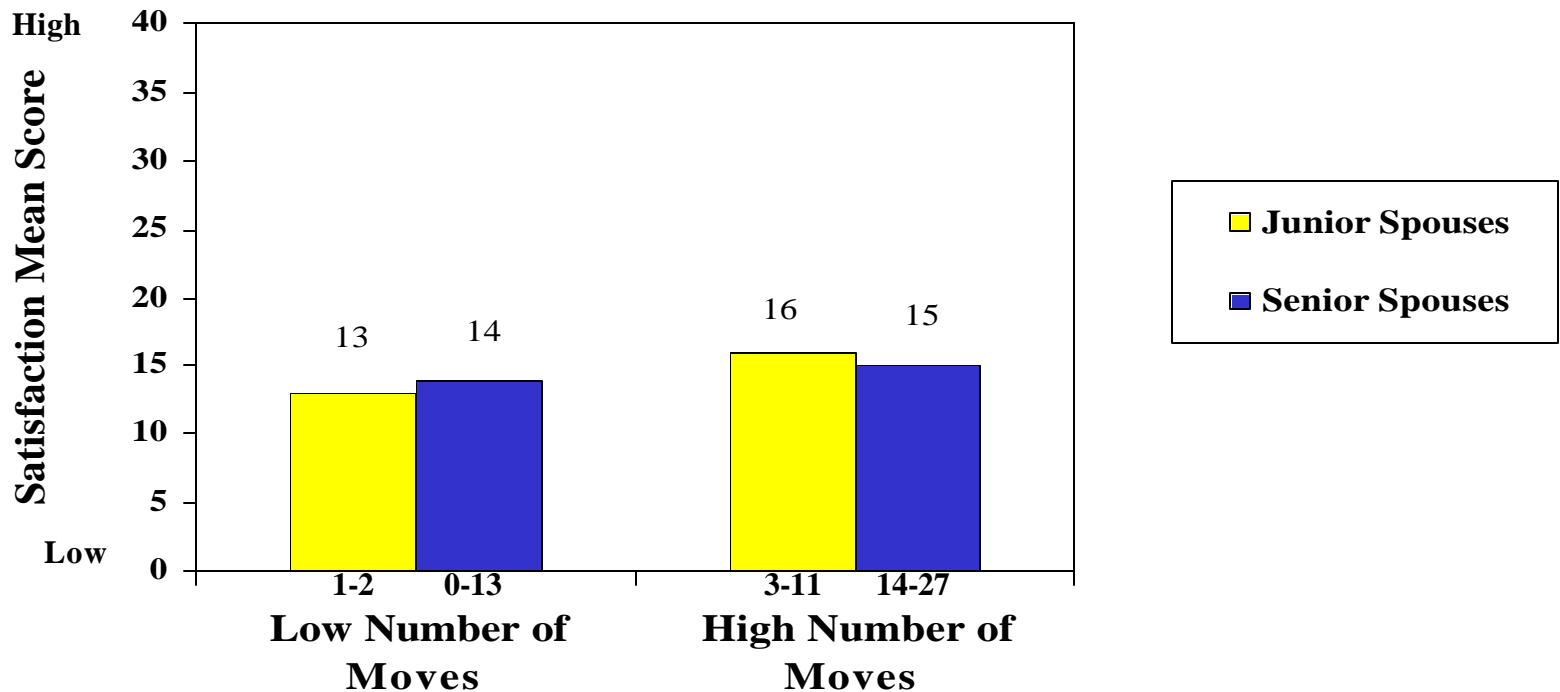
- For Senior spouses, those with a low number of moves were not significantly different than from those with a high number of moves in terms of psychological health (Median splits: ($t = -.57$, $df = 30$, $p < .573$)).
- However, for Junior spouses, those with more moves had better psychological health (Median splits: ($t = 2.08$, $df = 76$, $p < .039$)).





Number of Moves: Army Satisfaction

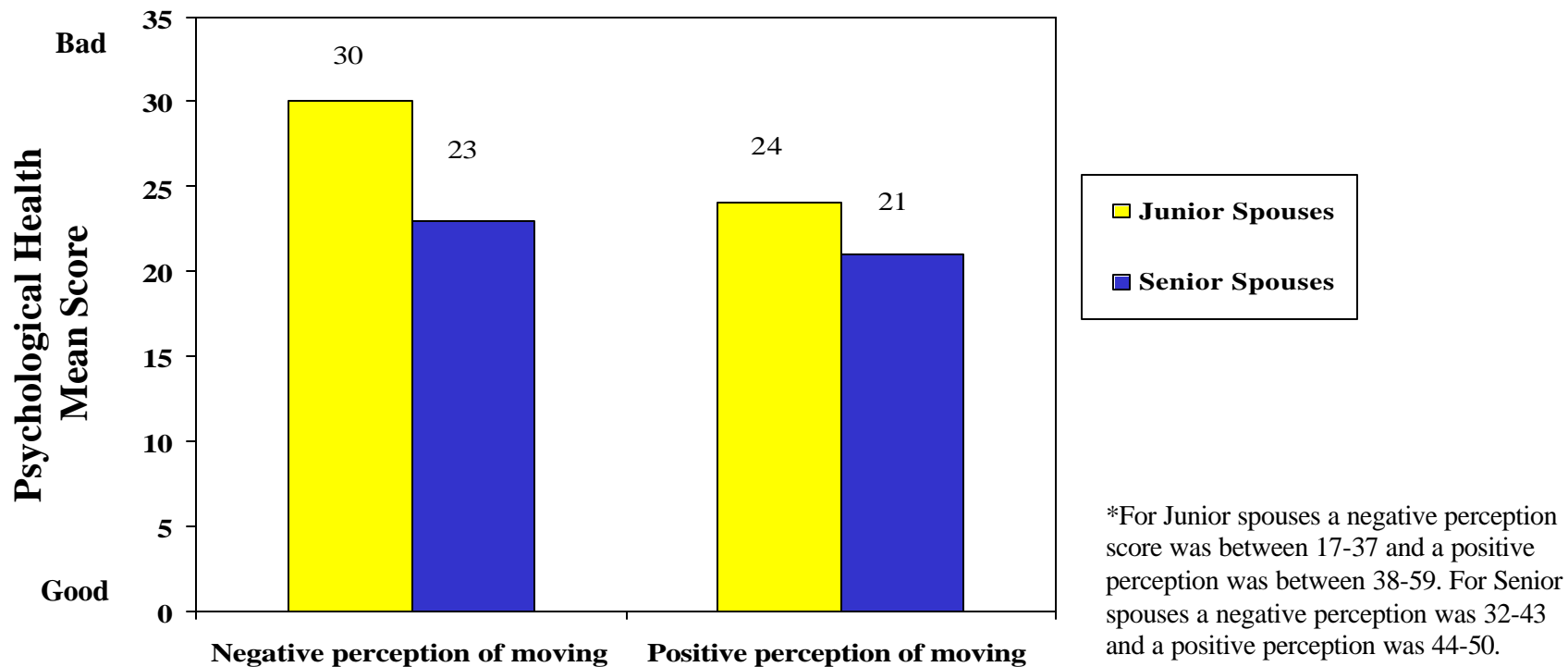
- For Senior spouses, those with a low number of moves were not significantly different than from those with a high number of moves in terms of their satisfaction with the Army (Median splits: ($t = -1.76$, $df = 30$, $p < .089$)).
- However, for Junior spouses, those with more moves were more satisfied with the Army than those with less moves (Median splits: ($t = 2.57$, $df = 75$, $p < .012$)).





Geographic Mobility: Psychological Health

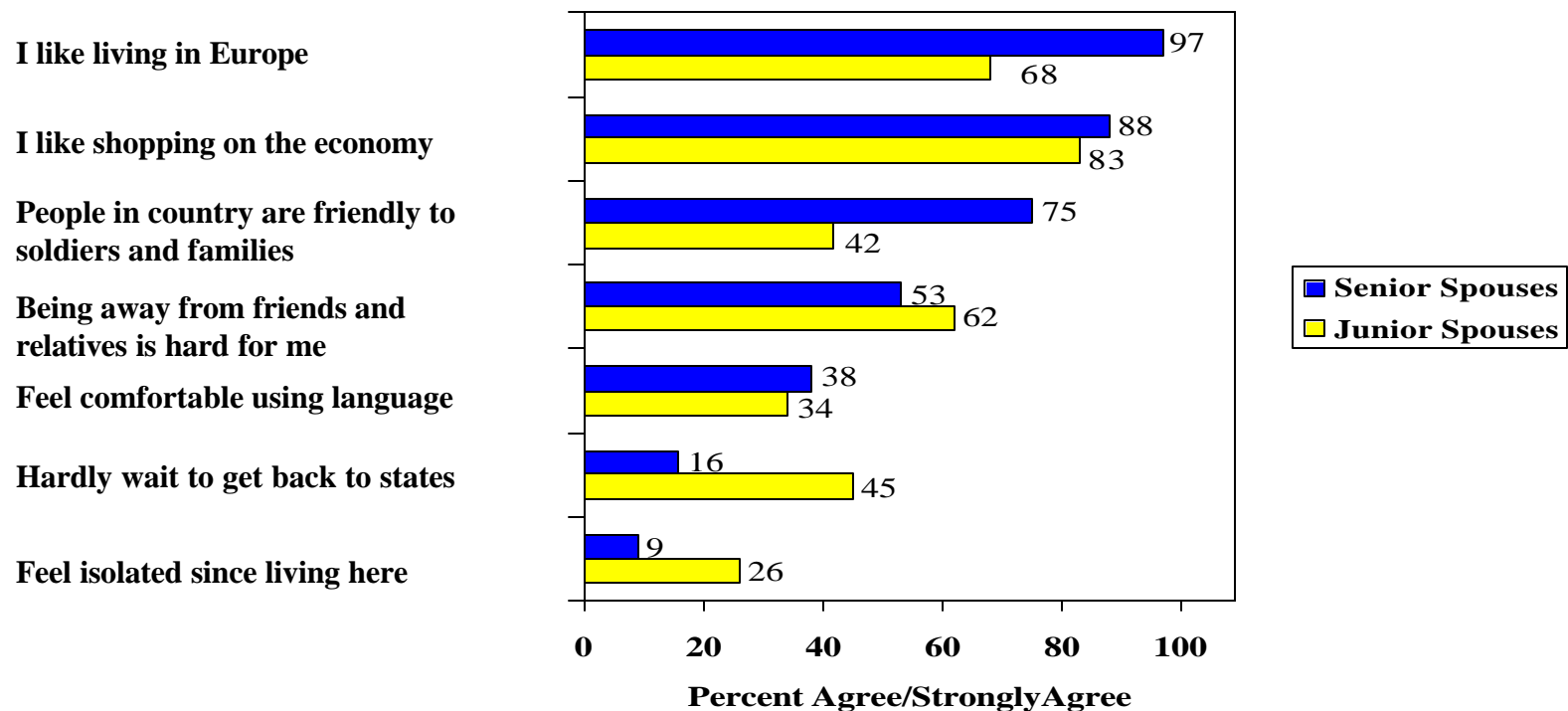
- Senior spouses' perceptions towards moving were not related to their psychological health (Median splits: ($t = 1.21$, $df = 30$, $p < .235$).
- However, for Junior spouses, those with better perceptions of moving had better psychological health (Median splits: ($t = 2.94$, $df = 76$, $p < .003$).





Living Overseas

- A large majority of spouses liked living and shopping in Europe.
- However, Senior spouses like living in Europe significantly more than did Junior spouses ($t = 3.50$, $df = 107$, $p < .001$).
- Forty-five percent of Junior spouses could hardly wait to go stateside compared to only 16% of Senior spouses.





Fear of Soldier Injury or Death

- Although the majority of both Senior and Junior spouses reported that their soldiers were well trained to handle the dangers of deployment, many still feared that their soldier might be injured or killed.
- Junior spouses had significantly higher fear levels than Senior Spouses ($t = 3.36$, $df = 101$, $p < .001$).

If my spouse is injured or dies I can successfully manage the household on my own

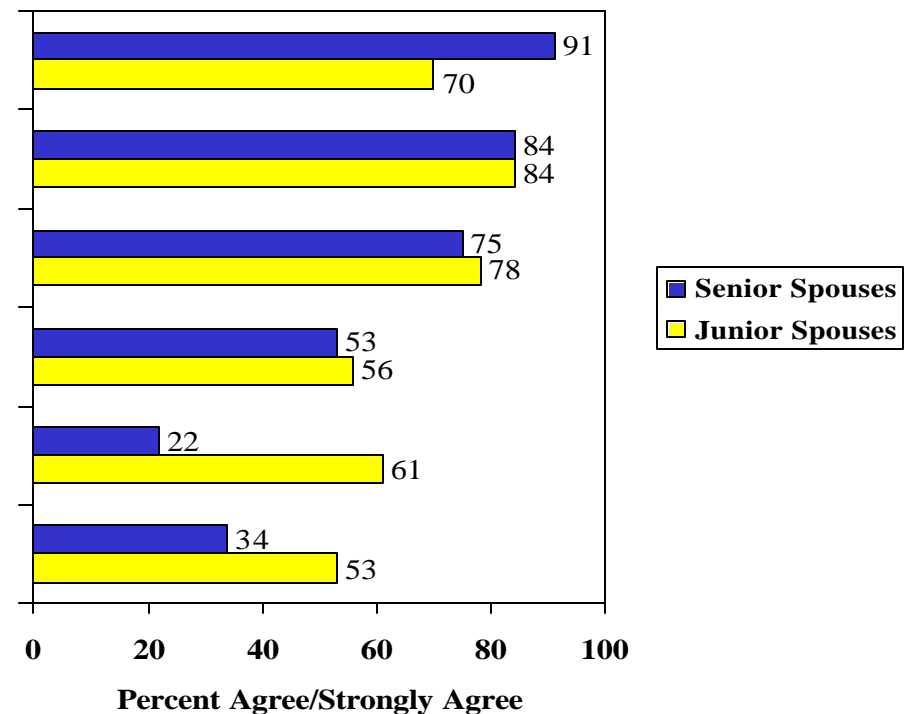
I feel that my spouse is well trained to handle the dangers of deployment

I worry about my spouse being injured on a deployment

I worry about my spouse being killed on a deployment

Given my spouse's job there is a higher risk for injury or death

There is a strong possibility that my spouse will be in combat during a deployment





Fear of Soldier Injury or Death: Readiness

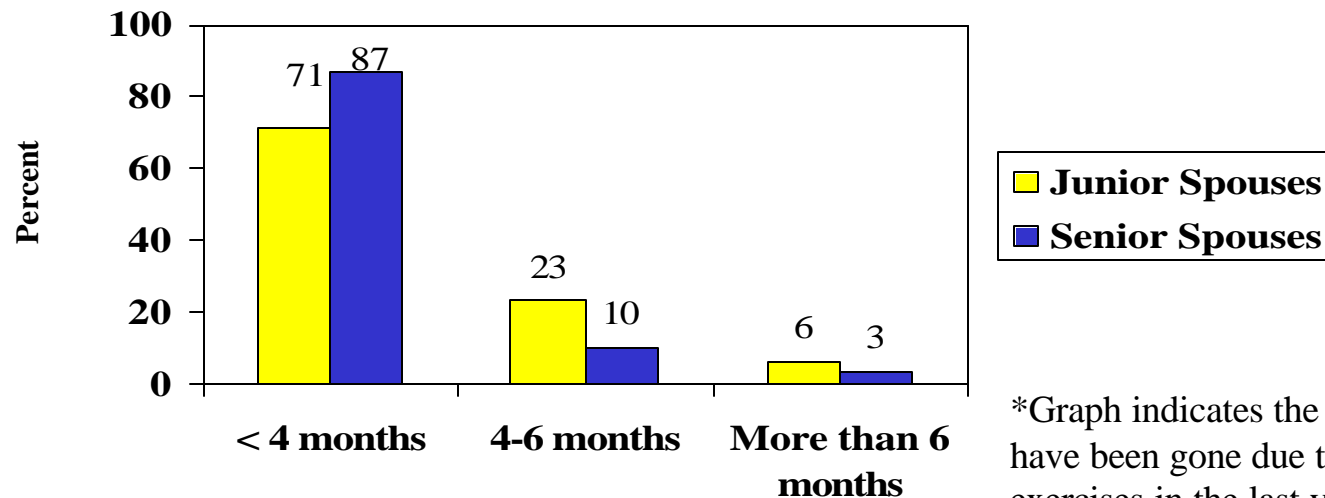
- Over three quarters (77%) of Senior spouses had wills compared to only 32% of Junior spouses.
- Few Senior or Junior spouses had powers of attorney (general or medical).

	Both my spouse and I have (%)		I have (%)		My spouse has (%)		Neither my spouse nor I have (%)	
	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior
General Power of Attorney	20	19	10	21	53	46	17	14
Medical Power of Attorney	11	12	4	4	4	4	82	80
Will	77	30	0	2	23	34	0	34
Living Will (Advanced Directive)	21	14	7	4	0	4	72	78



Training and Deployments

- On average, Senior spouses reported that in the last year their soldiers were gone for approximately 43 days for training or field exercises. Junior soldiers were gone an average of 80 days ($t = 2.88$, $df = 105$, $p < .005$).
- The average number of times that Senior spouses' soldiers have been deployed since being in Europe was less than once. Junior soldiers were also deployed an average of less than once.

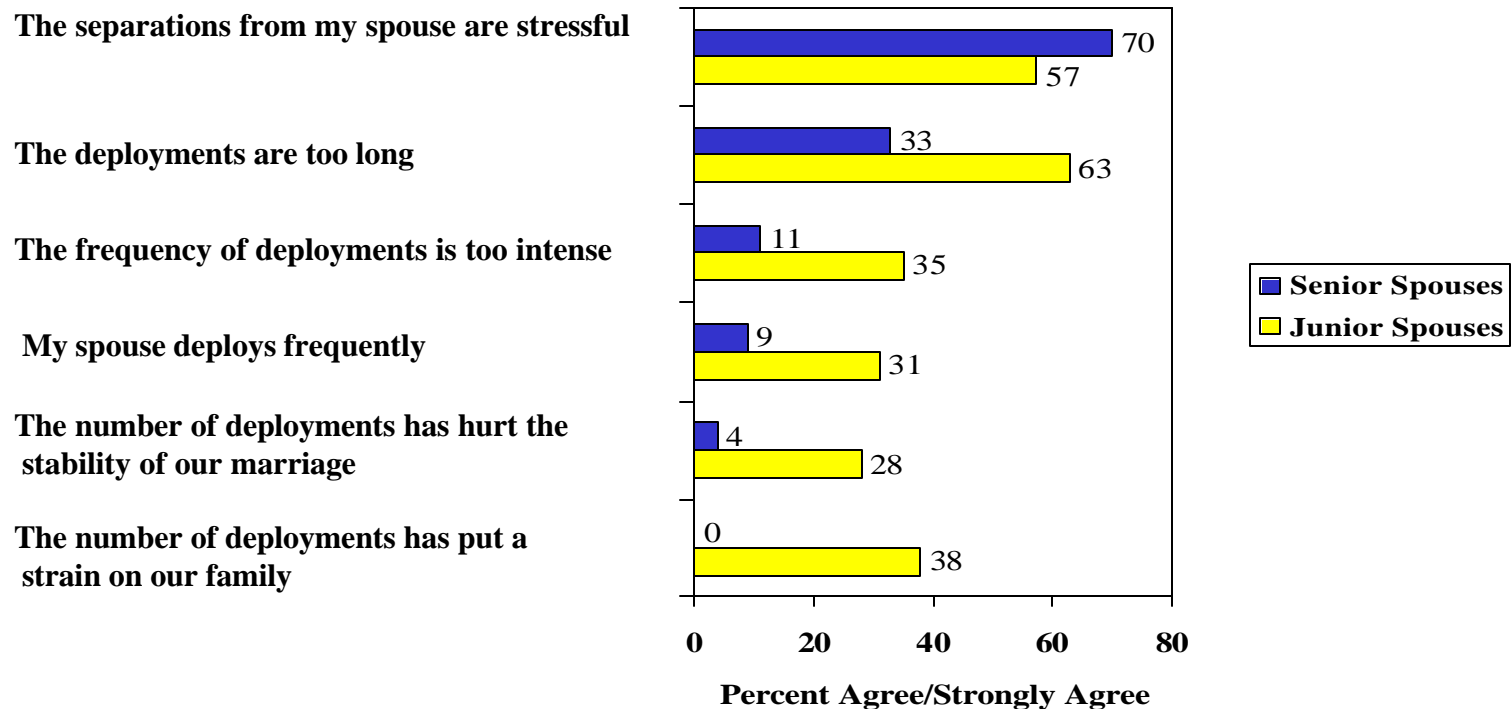


*Graph indicates the percent of soldiers who have been gone due to training or field exercises in the last year.



Deployments

- Compared to Senior spouses, Junior spouses reported that deployments had a significantly greater negative impact on their families and on their marriages ($t = -4.81$, $df = 50$, $p < .000$).
- However, 70% of Senior spouses reported that the separations from their soldiers were stressful compared to 57% of Junior spouses.





Separations

- Many spouses felt lonely during separations due to training exercises and military deployments. However, many became more independent and experienced greater closeness after the separations.
- Junior and Senior spouses were not significantly different from one other with regard to their independence ($t = 1.50$, $df = 91$, $p < .136$).

During the separation, I became more independent

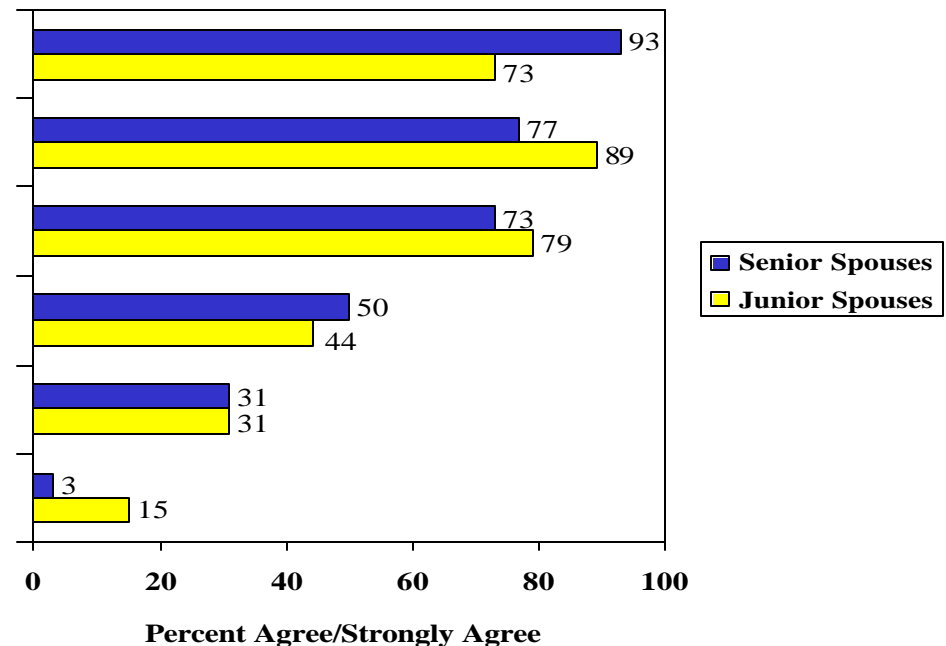
During the separation, I felt lonely

There were greater feelings of closeness when my spouse returned

During the separation, I realized how much I depended on my spouse

Upon his/her return I participated more in decision making

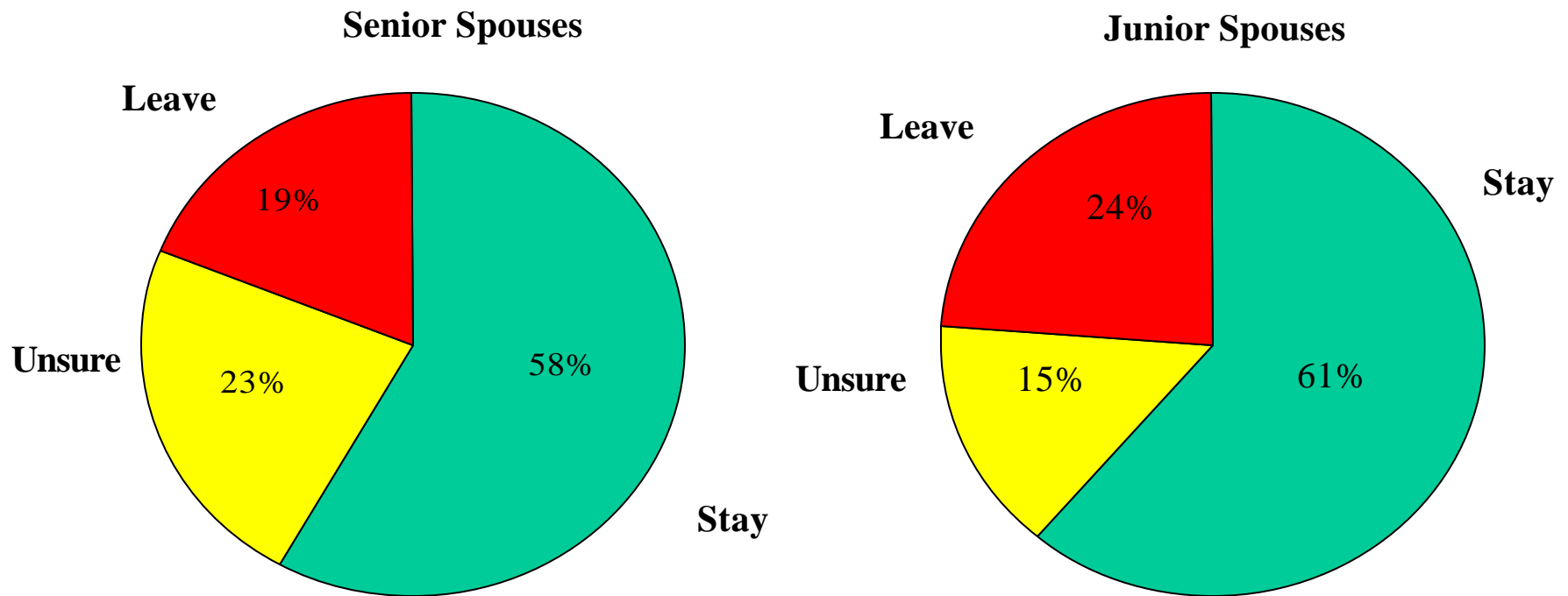
During the separation there was suspicion and mistrust between my spouse and me





Retention Preference

- Fifty-eight percent of Senior spouses wanted their soldiers to remain in the Army for 30 years or more. Nineteen percent said they did not want their soldiers to stay in beyond 30 years and 23% were unsure.
- Among Junior spouses, 61% of spouses said that they wanted their soldiers to stay beyond their present obligation, while 24% wanted their soldiers to leave upon completion of their current obligation and 15% were undecided.





Discussion

The findings presented here show that:

- Although all spouses were in good physical and psychological health, Senior spouses reported better overall health than did Junior spouses.
- Moving, living overseas, military separations, and fears regarding soldier injury or death were significantly associated with spouse health, satisfaction with the Army, and the desire for the soldier to remain in the military for Junior spouses but not for Senior spouses.

These findings suggest:

- Self-selection has occurred. That is, spouses who are satisfied with the Army way of life are more likely to remain part of the military while those who are not satisfied choose to leave.
- Experience with the Army way of life may allow spouses to adapt to the lifestyle, such that the first few years in the Army may have the most significant impact. Thus, spouses who may not be happy in the early years may actually adjust to the demands and not be affected by them during the later years.
- Future research will test the Army demands model on other Army spouses in varying locations and under different circumstances.



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